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COERCION IS *NOT* CONSENT

Jessica Fisher

Emory University's public health documents¹ define coercion as, "A tactic that perpetrators use to exert power and control over another person. Coercion occurs when a person intimidates, tricks, forces, or manipulates someone into engaging in sexual activity without the use of physical force." The definition goes on to say that, "Perpetrators may also use threats of violence, blackmail, drugs, and/or alcohol to coerce someone into sexual activity." Additionally, coercive statements may be used against someone. Emory lists four examples:

"If you really loved me, you would have sex with me."

"If you won't have sex with me, I'll find someone who will."

"But you've been flirting with me all night."

"I didn't realize you were such a prude."

According to the Adolescent Sexual Coercion Fact Sheet released by the Oregon Health Authority, "Victims of peer sexual coercion often experience heightened psychological symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress."²

According to the website, "Talk with Your Kids," the CDC has found that, "1 in 10 teens said they had coerced another person into some form of sexual activity." Similarly, "... among teens who have had sex before 15, over 40% of girls reported being forced to have sex and over 5% of boys reported being forced to have sex."³

Coercion happens most often because none of the parties involved understand that what is happening is coercion. Further, coercion happens because none of the parties involved understand that coercion is not consent. This occurs because there is a lack of comprehensive education around consent and what consent is and why it's necessary.

I was 16 before I ever had sex. After suffering sexual abuse as a young kid, and dealing with the confusion of physical and social dysphoria (which I spent a long time interpreting as "insanity"), I was not gung-ho about participating in sex, especially if it

1 "Consent Vs. Coercion". Office of Health Promotion. Emory University.
http://studenthealth.emory.edu/hp/respect_program/consent_vs_coercion.html

2 <https://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyPeopleFamilies/ReproductiveSexualHealth/Documents/edmat/adolescentsexualcoercion.pdf>

3 "Sexual Coercion". Talk With Your Kids.
<http://www.talkwithyourkids.org/pages/sexual-coercion/sexual-coercion.html>

involved my penis. I found out many years later that I identify along the asexual spectrum, as a demisexual.

My girlfriend when I was 16 was very forceful about us having sex. She was so ready to have sex that she was prepared to do it in my room at my dad's house, with the door open, and four other people in the house. She couldn't fathom why I was apprehensive about that, or apprehensive about doing it at her house, where her dad could come home, or walk in on us.

My girlfriend asked me if I loved her. She asked me if I wanted to make her happy. She asked me if I wanted to take our relationship to the next level, and if I said no, she got pouty. I felt like I couldn't tell her no, I felt like if I wanted to keep the relationship, I had to have sex with her, and because of this anxiety, and her persistence, my first time ended up being in the back of the cab of a pick-up truck in a supermarket shopping center parking lot.

"Talk with Your Kids,"⁴ goes on to say that teens are five times more likely to be coerced if they have a history of sexual abuse.

Consent needs to be conscious, constant, emphatic and sober. Consent can only happen amongst two sober adults. Consent can only happen with constant reaffirmed yesses (this has been affirmed in one case by the California government, with the passage of their 'Yes means Yes' law).⁵ If someone says no and you ask them again and then they say yes, that's coercion.

And coercion is not consent.

4 Ibid.

5 Senate Bill No. 967.

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB967